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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [SG](#)
SUBJECT: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY APPROVES CONSTITUTIONAL
AMENDMENT EXTENDING TERM UNTIL FEBRUARY 2007

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: On December 16, Senegal,s National Assembly passed a provisional constitutional amendment, extending deputies, terms in office from June 2006 until February ¶2007. President Abdoulaye Wade, whose goal was to delay legislative elections in order to couple them with the presidential elections, proposed the change. Most opposition parties boycotted the vote and organized a major political rally to denounce the law. They fear this may be one of several strategic moves to alter the Constitution and ensure Wade,s reelection, as well as his party,s longevity in power. END SUMMARY.

A MECHANICAL MAJORITY

¶2. (SBU) The temporary amendment suspends the applicability of Article 60 of the Senegalese paves the legal pathway for President Wade to couple legislative and presidential elections in February/March 2007. The coupling of the elections, which was first broached in a public speech by Wade in August, would reportedly free up funds that could be used to assist victims of devastating floods that hit many Senegalese communities earlier this year. After the elections, the amendment becomes null and void. A majority of 72 deputies (3/5ths of the Assembly) was required to pass the law, but the ruling Democratic Party of Senegal (PDS) and its coalition partners secured 82 votes. Even PDS deputies who are in open rebellion against Wade voted in favor of the law for reasons of personal interest. Within the last year, President Wade has offered substantial financial and in-kind benefits to deputies. No doubt desire to retain these benefits played some role in the vote.

AND AN UNCIVIL OPPOSITION

¶3. (U) The day after the vote, two dozen opposition parties organized a rally to condemn the amendment and call for an end to Wade,s regime. According to police sources, 25,000 people gathered to make their voices heard. For their part, opposition sources claimed that over 100,000 supporters turned out. They made it clear that, from this juncture onward, they will be more confrontational with the PDS. One opposition leader told Embassy staff that the only language Wade understands is &violence.8 Ironically, prior to the opposition gathering, the GOS intervened to stop PDS radicals from staging a counter-demonstration. Ousmane Tanor Dieng, leader of the Socialist Party (PS), the main opposition party, broke from his characteristically moderate stance and told the press: &The Government will be responsible for electoral unrest that is likely to occur. They have put the country in legal insecurity." Dieng also indicated that they will formulate a request to the Constitutional Court to declare the new amendment unconstitutional. However, it was Talla Sylla who really energized the opposition rally.

COMMENT

14. (SBU) Many Senegalese hoped that the alternance, the peaceful change of regime in 2000, would mark the beginning of an era of institutional stability and strengthen the country's democratic tradition. However, recent tinkering with the Constitution, together with frequent government reshuffles, point to seeds of instability buried within the clientele system. The extension of the national assembly's mandate and the possible reinstatement of the Senate after its elimination in 2001 seem to be part of a set of reforms that will provide the PDS with the means to follow the example of the PS, which had managed to hold onto power for 40 years before being unseated by Wade's coalition. END

COMMENT.

JACKSON